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ABSTRACT

The findings of a national study of black suicide are reported in this paper. A suitable explanation is sought for the increasing suicide rate among young blacks. The possibility of a link between suicide and the weakening of black community and family ties is explored. Specifically, the isolating effects of immigration and living alone are examined. These variables are viewed as limiting access to stable relations within the black community. In addition, an attempt is made to determine the relationship between black suicide and educational level as an indicator of social class status. Differences in suicide rates by age and sex are demonstrated in statistical tables. In States with the largest black population, both immigration and educational level are shown to be strongly related to black suicide. The relationship between black suicide and living alone, however, is weak. It is concluded that a link between a weakening of social relations (via alienation from traditional and familial ties) and black suicide is conceptually and empirically possible. (Author/GC)

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BLACK SUICIDE AND THE RELATIONAL SYSTEM: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNAL AND FAMILIAL TIES

Robert Davis

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a national study of Black suicide. The main purpose of the analysis is to suggest a suitable explanation for the increasing suicide rate among young Blacks. I examined the possibility of a link between a weakening of communal and family ties and Black suicide, focusing on the "isolating effect" of inmigration and living alone. These variables were viewed as limiting access to stable, positive functioning relations within the Black community, which have traditionally served as a buffer against suicide. In addition, I attempted to ascertain the relationship between Black suicide and an indicator of social class status (educational level).

An analysis of the states with the largest Black population showed both inmigration and educational level to be strongly related to Black suicide. But the relationship between Black suicide and living alone was uniformly weak. Even when the proportion of the Black population ages 20-34 was included in the model, I found that this variable is not significantly related to Black suicide. I concluded that a link between a weakening of social relations (via alienation from traditional communal and familial ties) and Black suicide is conceptually and empirically plausible.

Black Suicide and the Relational System: Theoretical and Empirical Implications of Communal and Familial Ties

In recent years Black suicide has received increasing attention among behavior scientists specializing in suicide research. Generally these specialists disagree with one another about the etiological factors associated with Black suicide, but they all agree that suicide is increasing among Blacks, especially among young Blacks (see Seiden, 1972; Peck and Litman, 1973; Davis, 1975; Slater, 1973; Woodford, 1965). A review of previous literature on the phenomenon of Black suicide suggests a variety of factors that may be considered as determinants of the current increase in Black suicide, including such factors as migration, rage and frustration, selected urban stresses (i.e., unemployment, poverty, racism, etc.), movement into the American middle class, breakdown in traditional social institutions (i.e., church, family, school, etc.), and certain conditions associated with fatalism.

In addition, part of the increase is thought by some to be the artifact of reporting. As a result of being more cognizant of Blacks, coroners are thought to be investigating ambiguous Black deaths much more thoroughly today than they did in the past. Another possible explanation argues that the increase in Black suicide can, at least in part, be a result of suggestion and imitation once the initial reports of an increase appear in the news media. David Phillips (1974) has shown that this could be so.

In the present analysis I will be examining the possibility of a link between the loosening or weakening of communal and familial ties, indicators of what Henry and Short (1954) have called "Strength of the

Relational System," and Black suicide. Evidence can readily be mounted to support such a view since social scientists assume that close social bonds are both critical to the individual and help integrate him/her into the social system. Furthermore, a lack of such bonds is frequently used in the deviance literature to explain a wide variety of deviant behaviors. In short, I examine here the effects of weakening of the relational system (i.e., alienation from traditional institutional structures, relationships and groups within the Black community) upon Black suicide while controlling for relevant social structural variables. I propose that such social relations are necessary for the development of positive and functional forms of response to recurrent stressful social situations.

1. RECENT TRENDS IN BLACK SUICIDE

On a national level, recent mortality statistics disclose that suicide among Blacks is primarily a youthful phenomenon. The data in Table 1 indicate that the bulk of Black suicides (47%) occur among young Blacks, ages 20-34. Examining the data in Table 2, we can readily see that older Black people seldom take their own lives. It is worthy of note that, overall, the Black suicide rate declines with increasing age, whereas with whites it increases in direct relationship to advancing chronological age. To some extent, the youthful nature of Black suicide reflects a national increase of adolescent suicides across all racial groups (Peck and Litman, 1973). However, this increase is most pronounced among Blacks, and in recent years has reached epidemic proportions.

Of the 8,136 Black suicides occurring from 1970 through 1975, 1,994 (25%) were female, and 6,142 (75%) were male. During this same period,

Table 1

Recent Trends in Black Suicide
by Selected Age Groups and Sex,
1970-1975

Age and Sex	Number	Percentage		Average Annual Rate	Percentage Change, 1970 to 1975
Male, all ages	6,142	75.5		9.3	25.9
20-24	1,206	14.8		22.3	15.1
25-29	999	12.3	36.1	23.6	41.6
30-34	728	9.0		20.1	9.1
Female, all ages	1,994	24.5		2.7	8.0
20-24	362	4.5		5.5	10.4
25-29	311	3.8	11.0	6.1	13.8
30-34	221	2.7		4.9	-21.8
Both sexes, all ages	8,136	100.0		5.8	21.6
20-24	1,568	19.3		13.0	16.2
25-29	1,310	16.1	47.1	14.0	35.8
30-34	949	11.7		11.7	1.7

Table 2

Suicide Rates, per 100,000 U.S. Population by Race, Age, and Sex, 1970 and 1975

	BLACKS						WHITES					
	1970			1975			1970			1975		
All Ages (in yrs.)	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females	Both Sexes	Males	Females
< 5	5.1	8.1	2.5	6.2	10.2	2.7	12.4	18.0	7.1	13.6	20.1	7.4
5-9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10-14	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.7	1.1	0.3	0.9	1.4	0.4
15-19	3.8	4.8	2.9	3.9	6.4	1.6	6.2	9.4	2.9	8.1	13.0	3.1
20-24	11.7	20.5	4.8	13.6	23.6	5.3	12.3	19.3	5.7	16.9	26.3	6.9
25-29	12.0	19.7	5.8	16.3	27.9	6.6	14.1	19.8	8.6	16.6	25.1	8.0
30-34	11.8	19.7	5.5	12.0	21.5	4.3	14.7	20.0	9.5	16.7	23.5	10.0
35-39	8.7	14.5	4.0	9.9	17.3	4.0	16.9	21.9	12.2	17.0	22.8	11.4
40-44	7.1	11.4	3.5	9.0	15.2	3.8	19.1	24.6	13.8	19.9	26.1	13.9
45-49	9.2	15.9	3.5	7.9	13.7	2.9	20.6	28.2	13.5	21.4	29.1	14.0
50-54	7.3	11.3	3.9	6.0	10.4	5.3	21.9	30.9	13.5	21.6	20.2	13.6
55-59	6.9	12.9	1.7	7.2	11.7	3.3	23.5	34.9	13.1	21.9	32.0	12.7
60-64	4.7	7.7	2.2	6.5	9.8	3.8	22.5	35.0	11.5	20.7	32.3	10.6
65-69	5.9	9.7	2.7	5.1	8.5	2.5	21.9	37.4	9.4	20.9	35.0	9.6
70-74	4.7	7.0	3.0	9.3	16.0	3.9	22.7	40.4	9.7	21.2	37.6	9.3
75-79	2.7	4.5	1.4	8.8	18.1	1.9	21.4	42.2	7.3	22.3	44.9	7.8
80-84	8.2	16.6	2.3	3.1	6.6	0.8	20.0	45.8	5.8	19.4	50.3	4.7
85 +	5.8	10.2	3.1	1.3	3.8	-	20.0	45.8	5.8	19.4	50.3	4.7

Source: Vital Statistics of the U.S., (1970 and 1975, Part A, Tables 1-26).

the corresponding rate of Black suicide per 100,000 Black population by sex was 2.7 and 9.3 respectively. Bear in mind that when we portion out the youthful age group (20-34), the Black male suicide rate is four times greater than that of the females. Even more astonishing is the fact that Black female suicide increased by only 8% from 1970 to 1975, whereas for Black males it increased by 25% (see Table 1). Generally, the data in Table 1 indicate that although both sexes show increases from the earlier period, the increases are most dramatic among Black males for all age groups considered.

Within the 25-29 age group, Black male suicide increased by 42% as opposed to a 14% increase among Black female age peers. Similarly, within the 20-24 and 30-34 age groups, Black male suicide increased more rapidly than Black female suicide for the same age cohorts. More interesting is the fact that Black female suicide actually decreased by 22% within the latter age group. Furthermore, within the youthful Black age range 20-34, Black males account for 36% of all suicides, whereas Black females represent only 11%. It is among young Black males 25-29 that the highest average annual suicide rate occurs, 23.6 per 100,000; the corresponding Black female rate is 6.1 per 100,000.

These startling statistics indicate that the Black community is losing an increasing number of its future (youths) and its nurturing sources (women). Why is this particular segment of the Black population taking their lives?

It is the purpose of this paper to suggest a suitable explanation for the increasing suicide rate among young Blacks. Since this analysis draws heavily from materials presented elsewhere, the author makes no claim to

originality for the theoretical ideas presented (see King, 1974; Holmes, 1974; Bohannan, 1960; Durkheim, 1951; Henry and Short, 1954; Maris, 1969; Breed, 1966).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous etiological explanations of Black suicide have been generally speculative, lacking research to substantiate their projections. This is due in part to the paucity of empirical studies specifically designed to evaluate substantive theories about the causes of Black suicide. In general, behavior scientists, sociologists, and suicide experts, all agree that prior to this decade Blacks have been characterized by a low, stable suicide rate. Black suicide rates have been analyzed in accord with the general theoretical proposition that they vary inversely with "external restraints," as indicated by such factors as low social status and the insulation that strong relational systems afford during periods of stress (Henry and Short, 1954; Maris, 1969; Breed, 1966). However, the prevalence of an increasing suicide rate among Blacks suggests either that the "external restraint theory" is not a suitable explanation of contemporary American Black suicides, or that restraints have weakened on the portion of the Black community that accounts for the increase (young Blacks). This study develops and analyzes the latter position.

Many observers point out that in the past, the stress of overt racism produced a kind of survival solidarity among Blacks that tended to reduce self-destructive behavior (Woodford, 1965; King, 1974). Recently, however, there has been an increase in social opportunities (more prestige, better jobs, higher education, etc.) and social status for some Blacks. Generally

speaking, young Black males and females have experienced an uplifting of goals, aspirations, and expectations as a result of the perceived change toward greater opportunities within American society. Concurrently, this loosening of restraints has produced a false sense of freedom and security that has led to individualism and utilitarianism, which have tended to loosen or weaken the communal and family ties previously serving as a buffer against suicide.[1]

The theoretical propositions of Durkheim (1951) and research by Bohannan (1960) on African suicide document the importance of strong social ties. Durkheim's Law states that suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the group to which the individual belongs. When Blacks, due to excessive individualism, begin to internalize personal failures and frustrations, and no longer use the traditional structures, relationships, and groups within the Black community to shield them from full personal impact, alienation and anomie set in, increasing the liklihood of self-destruction. Bohannan, in a cross cultural study, also stresses the importance of group integration for suicide. He notes that the Dahomeans and Yaruba slaves in Brazil, well integrated groups, tended to kill their masters, whereas the Fulani in Gabon and Mozambique, less well integrated groups, tended to commit suicide. Generally, however, Bohannan observes that suicide rates in Africa are low because social ties are strong. Little or none of what Durkheim refers to as egoistic suicide, which arises from excessive individualism, exists.

Finally, it is worthy to note that Henry and Short (1954) advance the general proposition that suicide and the strength of the relational system are negatively related. My hypothesis, then, is that suicide among Blacks is likely to occur under conditions of weakened relations, i.e.,

loosening or weakening of communal and family ties. A theoretical model is presented in Figure 1. The primary interest of this model is the explanatory power of operational measures of weak social relations. As noted earlier, "weakened relations" refers to a process characterized by alienation from the traditional institutional structures, relationships, and groups within the Black community (i.e., churches, social clubs, fraternal organizations, etc.). Percent Black inmigrants, defined as the percentage of Blacks 5 years old and over who moved into a state between 1965 and 1970, and percent Black living alone, defined as the percentage of a state's Black population living in a one-person household, are the operational measures employed.

The difficulties in dealing with new and unfamiliar urban stresses are poignantly presented by Breed (1966) in his examination of the consequences of urban migration for suicide among Blacks in New Orleans. Breed found that the suicides in his sample had higher than average inmigration rates; thus, we anticipate that inmigration will be positively related to suicide. But his study does not utilize any controls, and, by relying on only one city, he is unable to control for selective factors.

The literature on integration and isolation suggests that persons who live alone tend to lack close interpersonal ties (see Durkheim, 1951; Cavan, 1928; Schmid, 1928; Gibbs and Martin, 1964). In the case of suicidal behavior this means that there is typically no one to intervene to prevent suicide, for simple reasons of proximity if nothing else. Furthermore, if a person is integrated into a set of social networks his/her life takes on meaning and value. Percent Black living alone, as an independent measure of relative isolation (lack of integration), is also expected to be positively related to Black suicide.

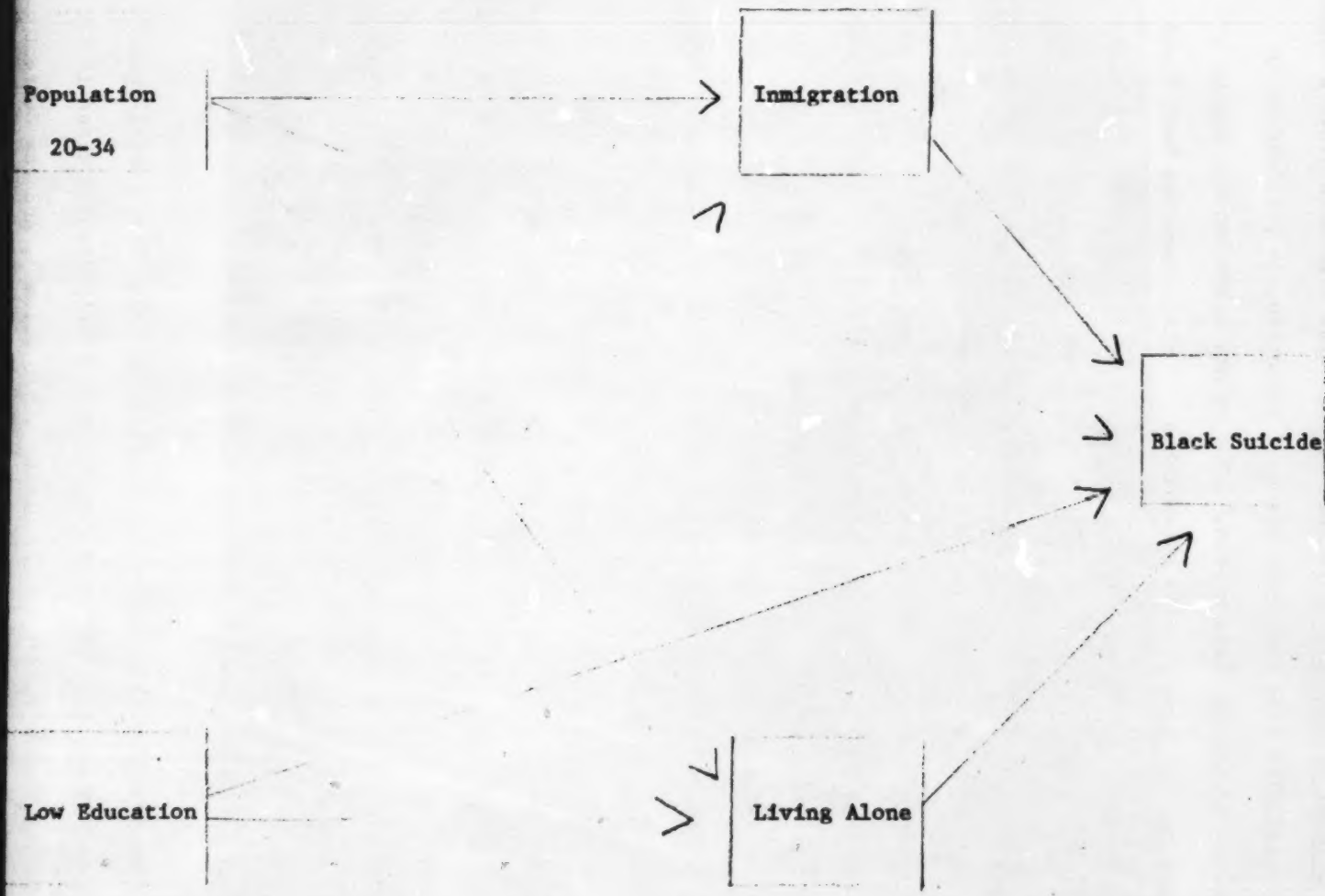

Figure 1. Determinants of Black suicide.

Percent low education, defined as the percentage of a state's Black population with less than nine years of education, is utilized as an indicator of social class status.[2] The relationship between status and suicide has not been clearly established. Social class has been found to be related to suicide in all three directions: direct, inverse, and curvilinear (Henry and Short, 1954; Breed, 1966; Dublin, 1963; Gibbs, 1968; Maris, 1969; Powell, 1958; Rushing, 1968). It is quite possible that each of these relationships is equally valid because the association between social status and suicide may depend upon the particular population studied (see Maris, 1969:124) and the confounding relationship among different populations of strength of relational systems. The issue is not settled, however, and the present research is directed toward ascertaining a clear and careful examination of the relationship between Black suicide and social status.

Finally, percent Black population 20-34 is controlled for, primarily because Black suicide is most pronounced within this age group. In the most recent decade, suicide among the youthful Black population ages 20-34 has risen to the point where it is nearly as high as that of their white peers (see Tables 1 and 2). Hence, we would expect this variable to be positively related to the Black suicide rate.

3. DATA AND METHOD

The data for this analysis are primarily taken from annual reports published by the National Center for Health Statistics (1970 and 1975), the United States Bureau of the Census (1970 volume), and the Current Population Survey (1971 and 1976). The data generated from these sources

allow us to investigate the hypothesized relationship between weakened relations and Black suicide in states with the largest Black populations in 1970 and 1975. I have chosen to use two points in time to get some indication of the stability of the relationship over time.

My operational measures of Black suicide rely upon nonwhite suicide statistics. However, to a very large extent nonwhites can be read as Blacks, since census data reveal that Blacks comprise from 94 to 90% of the total nonwhite population between 1970 and 1975. In addition, by limiting this sample to only those states with the largest Black populations the probability of including Black suicides in our sample is increased.[3] In computing the suicide rates in 1970 and 1975 for each of the 17 states, the number of nonwhite deaths (numerator) was provided by the National Center for Health Statistics, and the estimates of the nonwhite population (denominator) were taken from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The independent and control variables were also drawn from the CPS. This large, highly professional, and thoroughly routinized survey provides annual data on a whole host of social and economic variables. I also utilize the 1970 U.S. Census as the source of one of the independent variables.

Multiple regression analysis is used to determine the relative importance of each variable on Black suicide, while controlling for all other variables. Before turning to the substantive relationships, a word of caution is in order. This paper is concerned with an individual act and, to a large extent, with explaining it in terms of individual experiences, e.g., living in a one-person household. However, we are dealing with large aggregate units in this analysis; given the extreme rareness of the act in question and the characteristics of official statistics, an analysis such as this

one virtually forces one to use large aggregate units. However, using such units imposes at least two serious limitations, one dealing with the strength and the other with the possible spuriousness of the observed relationships. These issues are dealt with briefly here; for those interested in an excellent discussion of the considerations involved in shifting levels of analysis, see Hannan (1971).

Assuming that a relationship between two variables exists at the individual level, using aggregate instead of individual data will typically increase the magnitude of the observed relationships. As a consequence, except under unusual conditions, one should not attribute the strength of a relationship found at the aggregate level to the individual level. Furthermore, a relationship that occurs at the aggregate level may, at least occasionally, not occur at the individual level. These characteristics of aggregate data, however, do not pose a serious problem to the present analysis, for I am primarily interested in (1) determining whether <u>any</u> relationship exists between the social relations variables and Black suicide after the relevant controls are introduced, and (2) assuming there is a relationship, obtaining a crude idea of the relative strength of this relationship vis-a-vis the traditional social structural variables, which are also aggregate measures. Finally, it is plausible that across states, there could be a relationship between these measures of the relational system and Black suicides that does not exist at the individual level. Although such a relationship is mathematically possible, I am inclined to dismiss it as improbable.

4. THE ZERO ORDER RELATIONSHIPS

Before assessing the overall results of the theoretical model, it is important to discuss the zero order relationships between each independent variable and suicide. In Table 3, this information is presented for both time periods, 1970 and 1975. In most instances the correlations are relatively similar at the two points in time, although there are some exceptions to this general pattern. As noted earlier, emphasis in this model is on the explanatory power of two specific independent variables--percentage of Black inmigrants and the proportion of Black persons living alone--for Black suicide. Scanning the data in Table 3, we can readily see that the zero order relationships between living alone and suicide are uniformly weak and positive for both time periods (r=.421 and .413). These coefficients indicate that, without utilizing any controls, states that have a high proportion of Black persons living alone also have a high suicide rate. Percentage of inmigration also tends to be positively associated with suicide; however, the coefficients are much stronger (r=.763 and .674). At both points in time, states with high percentages of Black inmigrants were more likely to experience high Black suicide rates. In sum, the data suggest, at the zero order level, that only one operational measure of the relational system (inmigration) is strongly related to the Black suicide rate.

Of the two control variables, low education has the strongest relationship with Black suicide. In the state data, we see that in 1970 and 1975, the measures of low education have relatively strong negative relationships (r=-.763 and -.795) with Black suicide. The proportion of the Black population ages 20-34 had a weak positive relationship (r=.420)

Table 3

Zero Order Correlations Between Each Independent Variable and Suicide

Part A: 1970 (N=17)

	Suicide Rate	Percent Inmigrant	Percent Living Alone	Percent Blk Pop. 20-34	Percent Low Education
Suicide Rate	1.000				
% Inmigrants	.763	1.000			
% Living Alone	.421	.431	1.000		
% Black Pop. 20-34	.420	.549	.245	1.000	
% Low Education	-.730	-.813	-.593	-.771	1.000

Part B: 1975 (N=17)

	Suicide Rate	Percent Inmigrant	Percent Living Alone	Percent Blk Pop. 20-34	Percent Low Education
Suicide Rate	1.000				
% Inmigrants	.674	1.000			
% Living Alone	.413	.293	1.000		
% Black Pop. 20-34	.615	.513	.169	1.000	
% Low Education	-.795	-.813	-.231	-.729	1.000

with Black suicide in 1970 and a moderate positive relationship (r=.615) in 1975. The intercorrelations between inmigration, living alone, percent Black population 20-34, and low education show some change between the two time periods. In both time periods, the coefficients for the relationship between inmigration and low education are identical (r=-.813), indicating a strong negative correlation. However, this pattern is exceptional; the general pattern, as noted above, is one of relative similarity.

Table 4 presents the means for the two populations for all of the variables as well as percent Black, median income, and education. In 1975 there was a slightly larger proportion of the Black population between ages 20-34, a higher median income and median education, with a concomitant decline in low education and a slight decline in the percent Black population. The proportion of Blacks living alone and the suicide rate was higher in 1975, whereas inmigration was constant.[4]

Table 5 presents data that provide information needed to evaluate the variable linkages of the overall theoretical model diagrammed in Figure 1. In the first column coefficients of determination (r^2) are presented, indicating the amount of variation in suicide explained by each independent variable. In the second column standardized regression coefficients (Betas) are presented, indicating the relative importance of each variable, controlling for all other variables. In the third column multiple R^2's are presented indicating the total amount of variation in the suicide rate explained by the variables considered. In the fourth column changes in the coefficient of determination produced by the addition of each variable to our baseline model are presented.

Table 4

Variable Means in 1970 and 1975

	1970 (N=17)	1975 (N=17)
% Black Immigration	4.2	4.2
% Black Living Alone	7.2	8.7
% Black Pop. 20-34	19.4	21.8
% Black Low Education	35.8	31.0
% Black Population	17.9	16.1
Median Income	7,283	9,558
Median Years Education	9.36	9.78
Suicide Rate	4.6	5.2

Table 5

Regression Coefficients and Coefficients of Determination for the Dependent Variable Suicide Regressed on Four Independent Variables, 1970 and 1975

Part A: 1970 (N=17)

	r^2	Beta	Multiple$_2$ Indep. R^2	Change in Multiple$_2$ Indep. R^2
% Inmigrants	.582	.7138[a]	.5921	.5921
% Living Alone	.177	.1132		
% Black Pop. 20-34	.176	.0014	.5921	.0000
% Low Education	.532	-.6951[a]	.6493	.0572
R^2		.649		

Part B: 1975 (N=17)

	r^2	Beta	Multiple$_2$ Indep. R^2	Change in Multiple$_2$ Indep. R^2
% Inmigrants	.454	.6052[a]	.5056	.5056
% Living Alone	.171	.2359		
% Black Pop. 20-34	.378	.3591	.6006	.0950
% Low Education	.632	-.6607[a]	.6908	.0902
R^2		.691		

a = significant at .05.

5. RELATIONAL SYSTEM

As indicated in the theoretical discussion, it was anticipated that the measures of the relational system would be related to Black suicide, and hypothesized that inmigration would be positively related to the Black suicide rate. The fact that there are such strong relationships for both time periods suggests that it is one of the most powerful predictors of Black suicide. In fact, the independent variance explained (r^2), and the Betas are the largest in 1970 and the second largest in 1975. However, for both time periods percent living alone is a weak predictor of Black suicide. This is surprising, given the attention directed toward this variable in the suicide literature (see Durkheim, 1951; Cavan, 1928; Schmid, 1928; Gibbs and Martin, 1964). At the zero order level and with controls, we see that in both time periods living alone has a uniformly weak relationship to Black suicide. This set of variables (percent inmigrants and percent living alone) operating together account for approximately half of the "explained" variance in 1975, and nearly 60% in 1970. Thus, a link between a weakening of the relational system and Black suicide seems conceptually and empirically plausible, given the predictive power of our basic model.

As indicated in Table 3, at the zero order level we find that in 1970, the percent Black population 20-34 has a weak positive correlation with the Black suicide rate; however, in 1975 this relationship is much stronger. With controls we see that in 1970 the relationship is virtually nonexistent, whereas in 1975 the relationship remains relatively weak and positive. In sum, the state data reflect a clear and consistent positive relationship (states with large Black populations ages 20-34 have higher

suicide rates). However, the fact that we find such weak relationships suggests that the connection should be viewed with caution. Furthermore, percent Black population 20-34 adds absolutely nothing to the total explained variance in 1970, and accounts for approximately 10% of the total variances explained in 1975. In short, these data suggest that the proportion of the Black population 20-34 is not significantly associated with Black suicide in the 17 states considered in this investigation.

In both time periods, we find that low education has a relatively strong negative relationship with the Black suicide rate at the zero order level and after controls are introduced. This variable, along with percent inmigrants, emerges as one of the most powerful predictors of Black suicide. In short, for these states, Black suicide is associated with high education and a high inmigration rate. The reasons for this pattern are not immediately obvious; and whether it reflects young, educated Blacks who are relatively mobile being particularly prone to suicide or whether there is a contextual effect is not clear. However, as shown by the last two columns of Table 5, when we add low education to the basic model, the total variance explained is 65% (6% increase) in 1970 and 69% (9% increase) in 1975.

6. REVISED MODEL

Given the weak predictive power of both living alone and percent Black population 20-34, it seemed plausible to determine how their deletion from the overall model would affect its ability to predict Black suicide. The data in Table 6 indicate slight increases in the standardized regression coefficients (Betas) for the remaining variables

Table 6

Regression Coefficients and Coefficients of Determination for Revised Model: Suicide Regressed on Inmigration and Low Education, 1970 and 1975

Part A: 1970 (N=17)

	r^2	Beta	Multiple, Indep. R^2	Change in Multiple, Indep. R^2
% Inmigrants	.582	.7627[a]	.5817	.5817
% Low Education	.532	-.5808[a]	.6451	.0634
R^2		.645		

Part B: 1975 (N=17)

	r^2	Beta	Multiple, Indep. R^2	Change in Multiple, Indep. R^2
% Inmigrants	.454	.6743[a]	.4547	.4547
% Low Education	.632	-.6431[a]	.6385	.1838
R^2		.639		

a = significant at .05.

(percent inmigrants and percent low education) at both points in time. Specifically, the relative importance of inmigration as a predictor of Black suicide increased by .0084 from 1970 to 1975. Similarly, percent low education increased in importance by .0623 for the same period. It is interesting to note that the direction of both variables remains the same in our revised model.

The most remarkable feature of Table 6, however, is the fact that the independent variance explained by percent inmigrants decreased by 13% in 1975. As expected (see note 4), inmigration is a more powerful predictor of Black suicide in 1970. Conversely, percent low education is most strongly related to Black suicide in 1975. The total variance explained by our revised model (64%) is increased by 18% in 1975 and only 6% in 1970. Finally, the model explains virtually the same amount of variance in both time periods.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper suggested a number of reasons for expecting a weakening of social relations to be strongly related to the recent increase in Black suicide. Throughout the present analysis a great deal of concern has been focused upon the presumed detrimental consequences of becoming alienated from the traditional structures, relationships, and groups within the Black community. This form of alienation (i.e., excessive individualism) is thought to have its greatest effect among the youthful Black population (20-34), where the increase in suicide is most pronounced. I have been particularly concerned with the "isolating effect" of inmigration and living alone, which were designated as pri-

mary indicators of a weakening of social relations. These variables were hypothesized as limiting (in part or entirely) access to stable, positive functioning relations within the Black community, either at the family, group, communal, or institutional level.

An analysis of the variable relationships in the basic model shows only one of the "primary" variables to be a relatively strong and enduring predictor of Black suicide, particularly after controls are introduced. The fact that inmigration emerges as such a powerful predictor of Black suicide is consistent with the literature on Black suicide (e.g., Breed, 1966). The relationships with living alone were not striking. I have no explanation for the fact that previous literature on suicides (non-Black) suggests theoretical reasons for believing that living alone would be related to Black suicide. Of all the variables considered, living alone is by far the one most weakly related to Black suicide (see Table 3). Although there are small relationships at the zero order level, they virtually disappear when controls are introduced, indicating that living alone is, in fact, unrelated to the Black suicide rate.

A striking finding is that level of education, as measured by number of school years completed, is strongly related to Black suicide. Such a strong negative relationship (states with a low percentage of Blacks with less than nine years of education have high Black suicide rates) suggests that status is directly related to Black suicide. A comparison of the relationship associated with the above variables for 1970 and 1975 shows them to be relatively stable, particularly after controls are introduced. I would tentatively attribute some of this relationship to the empirical generalization that suicides are higher in the upper and middle classes than in the lower classes[5] (see Henry and Short, 1954).

One of the most striking characteristics of Black suicide is that it is most pronounced in the youthful age group 20-34. The latest mortality data indicate that the pattern of youthful Black suicide is persisting, and that it has become even more pronounced in recent years (see Table 4). It was anticipated that the proportion of the Black population 20-34 would be related to Black suicides and the fact that such uniformly weak positive relationships were found, particularly after controls were introduced, suggests that this variable is not significantly associated with Black suicide.

In summary, the state data suggest that inmigration has a very strong effect on suicide, whereas living alone has, at most, a slight effect. Of the social structural variables considered, educational level appears to have had a major effect at both points in time, whereas the proportion of Black population ages 20-34 has virtually no effect in 1970 and a weak effect in 1975. Thus, the current increase in Black suicide can be attributed, at least in part, to young upwardly mobile Blacks who are isolated from their families, communities, and social institutions. The Black community, in effect, does not function as a substitute society for these individuals. Finally, we should note that in both the original and revised model, inmigration "explained" slightly more variance in the Black suicide rate in 1970 than it did in 1975. This probably should be taken as indicating that the isolating effect of being cut off from stable, positive social relations within the Black community has its greatest effect during the initial periods of settlement. Generally, however, the total variance "explained" by both models is identical for both time periods.

Given the limitations of the use of large ecological units, i.e., states, in our analysis, it is felt that understanding of the determinants

of Black suicide and their relationship to the increasing suicide rate among young Blacks, has been broadened. However, this relationship could be more adequately addressed by utilizing smaller ecological units, i.e., SMSAs. This will be done in further research in the overall program of which this analysis is a part.

NOTES

[1]"False sense of freedom" refers to an illusion of widespread social opportunities and social acceptance within the dominant culture. "Individualism" and "utilitarianism" refer to the acceptance of white goals and values in the hope of social acceptance and individual profit or enjoyment. The American myth that "money means happiness" and automatic assimilation with the white culture is dominant.

[2]This measure of status is not uncommon in sociological literature; however, median number of school years completed or the upgrading of our current measure to 12 years (high school grad) are alternatives to the procedure utilized.

[3]The states included in this analysis are Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Tennessee, Illinois, Texas, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and California.

[4]For this paper, the data on inmigrants for states is the same for both time periods. The percentage of inmigrants to each of the states is based on gross migration for counties for the 1965 to 1970 period. Hence, in the 1970 period there is a five-year lag, and in the 1975 period a ten-year lag. The assumption is that inmigration should have its greatest effect (if any) in the earlier period (initial period of settlement). In addition, gross migration data for 1970 to 1975 were not available to this researcher.

[5]Henry and Short (1954) advance the proposition that suicide and status are positively related: They predict suicide will be highest among persons of high status and lowest among persons of low status.

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